

Summary

Interventions aimed at improving cognitive skills can lead to increased social adaptation and a reduction in reconviction of (ex) prisoners. Because such programmes are unavailable in the Netherlands, the 'Werkgroep Interventies' (Study group Interventions) of the program 'Terugdringen Recidive' (Decreasing Recidivism) decided to translate the programme Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) that had proved effective in the United Kingdom. The translated version (ETS-Cova) was implemented in the Netherlands.

The program consists of 20 sessions of approximately two hours and is run groups wise. There are two sessions a week. The total duration of the intervention is approximately ten weeks. A group consists of at most 12 persons.

To determine whether or not the ETS-Cova program is viable in the Dutch situation, the program was tested at eight locations. Within each location and per training group a pilot coordinator was appointed. The pilot coordinator was responsible for the local preparation and execution of the program. For the pilot three nationally operating intervention coordinators were hired and managed by the project leader of the 'Werkgroep Interventies'. The intervention coordinators, amongst others, had to coach the tutors and keep track of the preparations and execution of the program on the locations. Next to that they also ran a number of trainings.

A process evaluation has established how the implementation and execution of the program went, which bottlenecks arose and whether the program has been executed according to the instructions in the manual.

The implementation phase

The implementation of the program had a slow start and ran a difficult course. At some locations other activities obviously had more priority than ETS-Cova, there was little support for the introduction of the program or the pilot coordinator did not have sufficient mandate to arrange everything. Due to intervening budget cuts the intervention coordinators could only be hired in a late stage. Therefore they have not been able to support the pilot coordinators with the preparations. The project leader of the 'Werkgroep Interventies' had to take over these duties of the intervention coordinators. This resulted in a lack of clarity and delay.

According to the plan, ten tutors would be hired, evenly recruited from prisons and resettlement organisations. In the end eight tutors were found, of which one was recruited from a prison. Because of this the intervention coordinators had to run many more trainings than anticipated. For the recruitment of participants a number of criteria were drawn up in advance (18 years or older, a legal residence permit, a reasonable knowledge of the Dutch language, the ability to function in a group and a not too long resulting imprisonment after the completion of the program). At most locations mastery of the Dutch language and the ability to function in a group were hardly taken into consideration when it came to recruiting participants.

To estimate the suitability for participation in the program, the RISC was used. In principle, persons with an average risk of recidivism and a lack of cognitive skills could participate in the program. To fill up the groups on time, in some locations persons that did not meet the criteria but were found suitable by the pilot coordinator were allowed into the training. Despite the start up problems eventually 91 of the planned 96 participants were selected.

The execution of the program

On the locations where the selection of participants explicitly included the motivation of the participant, according to both tutors and participants, the execution phase has run better than on the other locations. The extrinsic motivating of the participants to participate in the program by offering positive and negative *incentives* worked out less good.

The locations where people had experience in running trainings, the personnel had been well informed and endorsed the importance of ETS-Cova, knew less problems than the other locations. Also the effort, commitment and steering possibilities of the pilot coordinator and the support for ETS-Cova within the organisation turned out to have an influence on the course of the training. Despite the start up problems, in the end 70 of the original 91 participants (77 percent) have completed the training. The percentage of drop outs was considerably lower for the intramural groups (13 percent) than for the groups of resettlement clients (42 percent). Not the cognitive skills but the level of social functioning proves to be determinative for the successful completion of the training. The most important reasons for drop out were repeated absence, disrupting behaviour during the training and lack of motivation.

The question of costs involved with the execution of ETS-Cova could not be answered in the process evaluation because the necessary information was not yet available.

The ETS-Cova program

For the effectiveness of the ETS-Cova programme, it is of great importance that the program is executed strictly according to the instructions in the manual and that the tutors possess the required competences. On nearly all locations the program was executed as prescribed. The analysis of the video footage of the tutors and the evaluations of the sessions showed that the tutors possessed the required competences to a (more than) adequate extent.

Both the pilot coordinators, participants and tutors indicated to be satisfied with ETS-Cova. According to the tutors, the number of sessions was insufficient to cover the complete course load. The time that was ascribed to the sessions was too short to cover the prescribed material. The tutors also missed time indications for the coverage of specific parts.

To examine the effects of the training over a course of time, an extensive set of questionnaires was given to the participants both prior to and after the conclusion of the training. Because of the large number of questions, some participants stopped filling out halfway through the questionnaires or filled them out 'blindly'.

Recommendations

Because the preparation and execution of the testing of ETS-Cova experienced some problems on a number of parts, we recommend a follow up on the first test phase. For a successful continuation of the test phase, the intrinsic motivation of the organisations to participate should be leading. In order to reach the right group of participants, the recruitment should pay more attention to motivation, cognitive skills and language skills of the participants. Because particularly the social functioning of the participants turns out to have a predictive value for successful participation in the ETS-Cova program, it is important to involve the score on 'social functioning' in the selection of participants next to the total RISC-score and cognitive skills.

In light of the conclusions we also recommend to invest in the recruitment of new tutors, preferably from prisons.

With regard of the execution of the program it is advisable to extent the length of a training session to 2,5 hours and to include a time indication per part in the manual.

To determine the influence and quality of the program as good as possible, tutors, pilot coordinators and intervention coordinators need to be well aware of the importance of registrations and evaluations. Lastly we recommend examining whether the current, very extensive questionnaires for the evaluation of the program can be modified or shortened.